

# GRASSROOTS

## Aboriginal Business in Alberta

Special Alberta Business Awards of Distinction edition

WINTER 2007



## RECOGNIZING AND HONOURING ABORIGINAL BUSINESS IN ALBERTA

The year 2006 saw Alberta's economy continue to flourish as soaring energy prices led to a surge in industry activity.

Aboriginal businesses in Alberta were a critical part of the economic boom, and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's (INAC) regional economic development program ensured continued success through its two main components - the Community Economic Development Program and the Community Economic Opportunities Program.

The importance of economic development was reflected by the Honourable Jim Prentice, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, at the August 2006 inaugural national meeting of First Nation economic development officers.

"Canada's new government is committed to supporting economic development in First Nation communities," said Minister Prentice.

"Working with our Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partners, our goal is to foster long-term, sustainable growth and to create self-reliant communities."

In Alberta, the importance of cooperative economic development ventures has long been recognized. Six years ago, INAC partnered with the Alberta Chambers of Commerce to create two new categories for the Alberta Business Awards of Distinction, the province's annual recognition of Alberta's top businesses.

In this special edition of Grassroots are profiles of the finalists for both the *Eagle Feather Business Award of Distinction* and the *INAC/Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative (AWPI) Best Practice Award of Distinction*.

The Eagle Feather award acknowledges a successful First Nations-owned business while the INAC/AWPI award celebrates the efforts of mainstream companies in partnering with First Nations. The winners will be announced at the prestigious Alberta Business Awards of Distinction gala on February 21, 2007.

### Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative (AWPI)

AWPI is a program of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada designed to increase the participation of Aboriginal people in the labour market. The federal government is committed to help Aboriginal people build stronger, healthier and more self-reliant communities. AWPI's goal is to educate and inform employers about the proven advantages of hiring Aboriginal people.

AWPI is committed to working with all sectors of the economy in promoting Aboriginal employment. Its partnership strategy brings together employers, the Aboriginal community, and other stakeholders, through partnership agreements that assist employers in the

recruitment, retention and advancement of Aboriginal workers. The goal is to remove the obstacles that separate employers and Aboriginal employees, meeting the needs of employers for skilled workers and increasing the opportunities for employment for Aboriginal people.

For further information on this program, please contact:

Peter Crossen  
Regional Coordinator, AWPI  
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Alberta Region  
Tele: 780-495-3782 E-mail: crossenp@inac.gc.ca

### IN THIS ISSUE:

- ✓ Partnering and cooperation (page 2)
- ✓ INAC's proactive approach paying dividends already (page 3)
- ✓ Diversification working well (page 4)
- ✓ Still a leader in its Aboriginal relations approach (page 5)
- ✓ Continuing to grow and excel (page 6)
- ✓ International award-winning company locally focused (page 7)
- ✓ No trash talking here, just proof of success (page 8)



Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

Affaires indiennes et du Nord Canada



# PARTNERING AND COOPERATION

BUSINESS AWARDS

INAC/AWFI finalist

Enbridge has been a North American leader in oil and gas distribution and transportation for nearly 60 years. They wear their recognized status as a pioneer of the oil and gas industry in Alberta with considerable pride, and are now an international company with nearly 5,000 employees on three continents.

During the past two decades, Enbridge has worked closely with Aboriginal communities across Canada, including Alberta, B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba and the N.W.T. Their list of partnerships, contributions, sponsorships and joint ventures with Aboriginal governments, corporations and communities is long and varied. Currently the company is engaged in operations or is developing business opportunities with almost 30 Aboriginal communities and organizations in Alberta alone.

"Our company is guided by its Indigenous Peoples Policy and this policy is implemented throughout our operations," said D'Arcy Levesque, vice-president of public and government affairs.

"We're committed to effective relations with Aboriginal communities because we believe ongoing relations based on mutual respect and trust are beneficial to all parties. We want to help build community capacity both in business and employment opportunities as part of our growing and diverse workforce needs. Enbridge considers Aboriginal youth will be an even stronger asset to the workforce of tomorrow."

Enbridge is proactive in its extensive interactions with Aboriginal communities across Alberta, and throughout its operations. The company recently contributed \$200,000 toward community outreach in support of the University of Victoria-based National Chair in Aboriginal Economic Development



PHOTO COURTESY OF ENBRIDGE

*Sable Sweetgrass, a member of the Kainai Nation (Blood Tribe) in Alberta, won the 19-29 category of the Aboriginal Youth Writing Challenge for her story Maternal Ties*

in Canada, attended the new Osoyoos Indian Band Centre for Aboriginal Community Enterprise General Business program with several First Nations from project areas, and also supports the advancement of Aboriginal economic development and youth entrepreneurship across the country.

Enbridge is also an active member of several major economic development and business councils and forums nationwide, such as the Conference Board of Canada's Council on Corporate Aboriginal Relations and the Canadian Energy Pipeline Association's Aboriginal Relations Committee.

Enbridge supports an impressive number of activities impacting Aboriginal communities culturally, artistically and educationally. Highlights include sponsoring the Inuit/Dene Games portion of the 2007 Canada Winter Games, the 2006 Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneurship Symposium (in partnership with the National Aboriginal Capital Corporation Association), the annual Aboriginal Youth Writing Challenge ([www.our-story.ca](http://www.our-story.ca)) and the National Aboriginal Achievement Awards, to name just a few.

Enbridge is committed to corporate social responsibility. For the third year in a row, the Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland has selected Enbridge as one of only five Canadian-owned companies to be among the top 100 most sustainable companies in the world.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ENBRIDGE

*Ms. Bonnie DuPont, Group Vice President, Corporate Services, with Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean Governor General of Canada and the participants attending the Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneur Symposium*

**ENBRIDGE**



BY SUEANNE MARSH

INAJAWPI (native)

# NAIT'S PROACTIVE APPROACH

NAIT provides training to 50 per cent of tradespeople in Alberta through 36 different apprenticeship programs. The institute is the third largest public post-secondary facility in Alberta and boasts an impressive 95 per cent hire rate for its graduates.

One of President and CEO Sam Shaw's key achievements has been the recognition of the need to enhance programs and services to meet existing and future needs of Aboriginal students at NAIT. He formed the President's Aboriginal advisory council shortly after taking the reins and acted on the two-pronged approach they recommended.

The first prong was to take NAIT courses to Aboriginal communities where they were most needed. The position of manager, customized Aboriginal training program was established to make this happen.

In 1999, NAIT had five programs delivered in Aboriginal communities. A short six years later, 57 programs were being delivered to Aboriginal communities, with only 11 of them delivered in a NAIT campus facility.

"We have had a lot of success taking courses to the communities where they are needed," said Stephen Crocker, program manager.

"We currently have eight MOUs signed with various First Nations and educational institutions, and last year we had over 800 people participating."

The second prong to NAIT's renewed focus was to improve support for full-time Aboriginal students. With the support of industry, the EnCana

Aboriginal Student Centre was opened in December 2003. Previously, the position of Aboriginal liaison coordinator was created to implement strategies and provide services that would improve graduation and retention rates.

"When my position was created in 1999, we had 75 self-identified Aboriginal learners and a retention rate around 33 per cent," said Diana Blackman, program manager.

"Within five years the numbers were over 500 learners and a retention rate close to 75 per cent. It is hugely gratifying."

Working with Aboriginal, education and industry leaders – particularly EnCana – the Aboriginal student success initiative raised \$4 million. Funds were earmarked for several specific initiatives. For example, two fully equipped mobile trades training units are in constant deployment across the province, there has been a boost to bursaries, scholarships and awards to Aboriginal learners at the institute, and specific curriculum development and mentoring services are increasing retention rates and boosting the number of Aboriginal graduates.

NAIT's leadership and the success of its programs are reflected by the recent mid-January celebration for the latest chapter of the alumni association. It is especially for Aboriginal students, something scarcely imaginable a few years ago.



NAIT's mobile trades training units



Students inside the Aboriginal Youth Centre at the main campus

PHOTO COURTESY OF NAIT



BUSINESS IN ALBERTA

Eagle Feather Smudge

# WORKING WELL

Primco Dene Ltd. is the management company for a group of companies owned by Cold Lake First Nations. What started in 1999 as a single business entity has grown into four distinct companies, each committed to excelling in their field.

Primco Dene Ltd. provides a variety of business and logistical services to area companies, including management consulting, payroll service, safety auditing, security service and card lock fuel service. Primco's latest expansion includes sales and distribution of environmentally friendly janitorial products to their clients.

Primco Dene Catering Corporation has partnered with Royal Camp Services Ltd. and ESS Compass Canada Inc. Together they offer customized, turnkey operation such as rig camp rentals, field catering, housekeeping and janitorial services. Primco's catering staff provides high quality food service while maintaining the highest levels of professionalism and customer service.

Primco Commercial Corporation provides automotive services through a Lube-X franchise in the City of Cold Lake. Lube-X offers fast, dependable oil change service and vehicle inspections. Future development will include further expansion and land development in Cold Lake.

Primco Dene (EMS) Ltd. is one of the largest providers of industrial emergency medical services to oil companies in Northern Alberta. Beginning with one mobile treatment centre and a paramedic, they now have a fleet of 16 4x4 mobile

treatment units, all equipped with the latest safety and emergency equipment. The company's services include advanced and basic life support, on-site 24-hour coverage and mobile first aid trailers.



One of Primco Dene EMS's Mobile Treatment Centre units near Cold Lake Air Weapons Range



EnCana's Foster Creek camp serviced by Primco Catering

PHOTO COURTESY OF PRIMCO DENE

"The goal at Primco Dene is to provide quality service and employment," said Tammy McLaughlin, operations manager for the company.

"Since inception, we've grown our sales by over 40 per cent, and we now have almost 125 staff on the payroll."

Primco strives to promote self-improvement and training of all of their staff through accredited institutions in Alberta in administration, culinary arts, emergency medical courses, journeyman certification as well as safety certifications.

The company has managed this impressive growth while maintaining a continuous minimum 80 per cent Aboriginal employment rate and keeping its debt ratio low.

"Our corporate mission statement and vision are what drives us," said McLaughlin.

"Through partnerships we strive for employment and training that enriches our employees and community, while providing premium services at competitive rates."

And this particular approach to economic development is working nicely.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PRIMCO DENE

Proud graduates of Building Service Worker certificate course display their diplomas



**primco dene**



BUSINESS AWARDS  
INAC/APP Finalist

# STILL A LEADER IN ITS ABORIGINAL RELATIONS APPROACH

Dating back through more than 30 years of operations, EnCana Corporation and its predecessor companies have always based their business success on a philosophy of cooperation and shared gains.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ENCANA

Harbir Chinna, V.P., Upstream Operations Oil Recovery greets Chief Morris Monias at the Heart Lake First Nation.

The Calgary-based natural gas and oilsands producer plays a major role in Alberta's economic growth and development and its approach to effective Aboriginal relations and community involvement has set a high standard throughout the years.

"Giving back to the communities we work with, whether through joint ventures, goods and services or volunteer efforts, it all matters," said Andy Popko, vice-president of Aboriginal relations.

"So, to us, it makes perfect business sense to actively pursue these win-win situations."

EnCana is a frontrunner in creative, innovative approaches to harmonized partnerships with Aboriginal companies, workers, bands and communities.

In the last two years alone, the company has purchased more than \$220 million from Aboriginal suppliers of goods and services. Additional indirect spinoff benefits through third-party contracts are estimated to exceed direct spending amounts. As well, the 2005-2006 fiscal year saw EnCana contribute more than \$760,000 to Alberta Aboriginal communities and associations.

Perhaps more important than the financial benefits is EnCana's industry leadership role in promoting cooperative Aboriginal relations.

Its many successes include establishing Aboriginal ownership of drilling rigs - currently 12 separate opportunities have been established - including a close working relationship with the Cold Lake First Nations' group of companies, a guaranteed long-term contract with Heart Lake Construction to obtain \$2 million worth of rock trucks to aid in pad construction at the Foster Creek oil recovery development, and a \$1.4 million agreement with the Chipewyan Prairie First Nation to build a 14,000 square foot building at the Christina Lake oilsands site to be used as a 600-person camp.

EnCana's involvement in education and training is noteworthy too. It contributes significantly to the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation programs for post-secondary studies and sponsors numerous community-focused bursaries and scholarships. It contributed \$1 million towards employment opportunities for Aboriginals in the fields of law and economic development, and it works with a number of Alberta educational institutions like NAIT, Keyano College and SAIT at developing programs and resources specifically for Aboriginal students. For its Aboriginal practices, the company was recognized by *The Aboriginal Times* as one of the top 10 companies in Canada last year.



Dancers from the Calgary area celebrate National Aboriginal Day outside EnCana headquarters

**ENCANA**  
energy for people



BIGSTONE VENTURES

Photo: Foster Media



Crew unloading equipment at an EnCana oil and gas field site

## AND EXCEL

"The importance of family, immediate and extended, is paramount to our company," said Zabot.

"We offer flexible work hours, comprehensive training, bereavement leave and assistance, and stress the importance of the Elders within the community."

The company puts back into the community in big and small ways too – from free lawn maintenance for seniors through its youth employment program to a percentage of the almost

\$4.6 million in wages it pays being re-invested in local spending. Bigstone continues to be a strong supporter of local schools, community events and sport tournaments through monetary and equipment donations.

The bread and butter of the operation continues to be the skilled labour and expertise the company has in construction, welding, pipefitting and plant and field operations and maintenance. They have also expanded to offer crews skilled in spill remediation and vegetation control.

Over the past three years, employee salaries have increased an average of 31 per cent and annual sales have increased by almost 35 per cent over the same period.

As the company has grown so has their inventory, and the equipment supply side of the business is taking on increasing importance.

"Through the partnership with Petrocare and ongoing growth and experience, we've gotten to the place where we're solvent and secure in our market share," said Zabot.

"Now we're focusing on teaching our youth through apprenticeship programs so they have the needed skills. The industry and the technology are constantly changing. And, of course, we never overlook the importance of investing in our community and all the benefits that brings."

PHOTO COURTESY OF BIGSTONE VENTURES



PHOTO COURTESY OF BIGSTONE VENTURES

Bigstone Ventures employee presentation to Grade 7 students in the Youth Apprenticeship Program at Mistassini School



# INTERNATIONAL AWARD-WINNING COMPANY LOCALLY FOCUSED

ATCO Electric's relationship with Aboriginal communities has evolved over many years.

Over the past five years, specifically, ATCO Electric has increased its efforts to work with Aboriginal communities to better understand their cultures and find ways to work together for mutual benefit.

"The company supports the communities we work in – not because we have to, but because we want to. Our relationship with Aboriginal communities is defined and measured by the mutual and enduring value we create by working together," said Sett Policicchio, president of ATCO Electric.

ATCO Electric works in many different ways to build mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal communities. For example, it calls on local resources to provide tree clearing and other work for the company. It also participates in career fairs, Treaty days and open houses.

ATCO Electric recognizes that employment and training is an area of mutual interest and benefit and the company has developed a particularly strong working relationship with the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation. It provided Sturgeon Lake band members the opportunity to attend an electrical training program and there have been many efforts to share economic opportunities with the First Nation, including brushing, vegetation maintenance, patrolling and clearing work.

ATCO Electric places a high priority on protecting traditional Aboriginal lands and sharing project benefits with Aboriginal communities. In 2005, the Edison Electric Institute presented ATCO Electric with the electricity industry's most prestigious international award for its leadership and innovation in the construction of the Dover to Whitefish transmission line.

"The innovative thinking and hard work of the ATCO people led to this massive project's completion on budget and in record time while demonstrating



PHOTO COURTESY OF ATCO ELECTRIC

*Brush clearing crew on the Judy Creek project*

progressive environmental leadership and strong relationships with our Aboriginal partners," said Policicchio.

ATCO Electric is an active member in both the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business and the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation's "Blueprint for the Future" Aboriginal Youth Career Fair.

In the past five years, ATCO Electric has established two new awards for Aboriginal students enrolled in technology courses at NAIT, worked with Northern Lakes College in Slave Lake in developing a trade's preparation course and is a key supporter of NorQuest College's Ben Calt Robe Cultural Camp.

ATCO Electric is headquartered in Edmonton and serves more than 182,000 customers in northern and east-central Alberta. The company has nearly 80 years of experience delivering power to homes, farms and businesses in 238 communities, including 27 First Nations and six Métis settlements.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ATCO ELECTRIC

*Dover to Whitefish transmission line project  
Aboriginal partner representatives*

**ATCO** Electric

© 2007 INAC/AINC

## NO TRASH TALKING HERE,

Karen Fransen photo

Mention the oil and gas industry to the average person on the street and they usually conjure up images of roughnecks at wellheads or pipelines snaking across the landscape. While it's a bit of a stereotype, these familiar icons represent only one aspect of the business. A company like Seven Lakes Oilfield Services represents another aspect – the waste service side.

"Yeah, waste collection is not the most glamorous business to be in," said Bob Hunter, business manager.

"But you look at where we started and where we are now, you'll see we fill a valuable niche and we're doing just fine."

They are indeed. Started in 2003 as a joint venture between Pimee Well Servicing Ltd. and Primco Dene Ltd., the company began with three employees and first-year revenues of just under \$500,000. Three short years later, the company employs 23 full-time Aboriginal employees, boasts an average annual employment growth rate of over 7.5 per cent, and had revenues of over \$2.4 million, a 78 per cent increase.

What's more, the company has expanded into a number of other business lines. They operate a recycling program at Imperial Oil Resources in Cold Lake, and provide scaffolding and journeymen scafolders, pipeline insulators and labourers

to a number of area companies, including EnCana, Husky Energy and IMV Projects, a Calgary-based project management company for the oil and gas industry.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SEVEN LAKES



Cleaning the windshield of the waste disposal truck

Please address all letters, comments and requests to:

**Grassroots – First Nation Business in Alberta**

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

Alberta Region

630 Canada Place

9700 Jasper Avenue

Edmonton, AB T5J 4G2

Tel: 1-800-567-9604

**Graphic Design:** Capital Colour Press

**French Translation:** Reuven Erenberg, Translatech

"Future growth opportunities with Imperial Oil Resources are huge," said Hunter.

"As we mature and prove that we can provide the services, Imperial is prepared to let us move forward. That certainly bodes well for future growth."

Seven Lakes Oilfield Services proudly identifies itself as a First Nations-owned company, and its all-Aboriginal management team regularly incorporates the advice of the community Elders into its long-range strategic planning.

It emphasizes the importance of family, community and culture to employees, and is very active in its sponsorship of Treaty 6 activities, including powwows, golf and stick game tournaments, school activities and a host of others.

The wellbeing of its employees is key to the company, as is putting back into the community and local economy through local purchasing wherever possible. While its core business might not be the most exotic line of work, Seven Lakes Oilfield Services is a great example of providing long-term employment while successfully carving out a market niche.



Published under the authority of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Metis and Non-Status Indians Ottawa, 2007

[www.ainc-inac.ca](http://www.ainc-inac.ca)

1-800-567-9604

TTY only 1-866-553-0554

QS-A023-060-EF-A1

ISSN 1493-857X

© Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre:  
*Gens d'ici - Entreprises autochtones en Alberta*



Seven Lakes employees unloading pipe

PHOTO COURTESY OF SEVEN LAKES